

Otter, Felix: *Grundkurs Sanskrit: Eine Einführung in die Sprache der altindischen Erzählliteratur*. Bremen: Hempen Verlag, 2017, 324 S., ISBN 978-3-944312-44-6

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It gave me pleasure to read the textbook *Grundkurs Sanskrit* (Basic course in Sanskrit), an introduction to the basic grammar of the language of ancient Indian narrative literature. Several books have been written in the last decade for learning Sanskrit, and this book by Felix Otter increases the stock of options for learning it through German.

I shall begin with some initial observations on structure and conventions. Firstly, the book's paper quality, printing and Devanāgarī font are of appropriately high quality. The main content of the book, in turn, is divided into twenty lessons in which the author has dealt with most major grammar points. Before the lessons are a table of contents, a list of abbreviations, a *subhāṣita* verse and an introduction. A “pre-course” functions as a preparatory lesson, and there is a small “excursus” on metrics between lessons 7 and 8. After lesson 20 is found a collection of appendices, reference tables, bibliographic suggestions, a Sanskrit glossary and a grammatical index.

In the “Vorkurs” (pre-course) preceding the lessons, the author introduces the Devanāgarī script. Throughout the book, this script is used side by side with Roman transliteration. I agree that this a good idea; readers need knowledge of both scripts, including proper use of diacritical marks. Also already in this pre-course, the topic of *sandhi* is introduced, to be continued further in several following lessons. Here I must disagree with the author's choice to leave out optional *sandhi*. For example, while discussing the *sandhi* of *vane + iva*, the author has explained the result as *vanai iva > vanayiva > vana iva*. I believe it would have been more proper to give this as वने इव > वनय् इव > वनयिव and optionally वन इव. Similarly, rather than *vane + eva > vanai eva > vanaiyeva > vana eva*, I would prefer वने एव > वनय् एव > वनयेव and optionally वन एव. Instead, the optional *sandhis* are simply not mentioned. In my own teaching, I find it necessary to discuss such optional *sandhi* rules, giving multiple forms of *sandhi* wherever possible so that learners can be aware of the possibilities. In addition, it might have been better to give more examples from each category of vowel, consonant and *visarga sandhis*.

Each of the twenty lessons begins with a list of vocabulary items, followed then by grammar points, which are further divided into smaller subsections. After this is included some material for practice although the nature of this latter aspect changes about halfway through the book: at the end of each of the lessons 1 through 8, the author presents exercises, which I agree make for good practice for the readers; the subsequent lessons 9 through 20, on the other hand, do not contain any exercises but rather a reading passage taken from the fables of the Hitopadeśa or Pañcatantra.

As for introducing a list of vocabulary items for each lesson, written in Devanāgarī, I agree that this is good practice. The author has a particular method of giving the word's gender and part of speech, including sometimes simply declining nouns in the nominative singular (e. g., “*meghaḥ*”, “*sarpaḥ*”, “*bhāryā*”, “*ambaram*” etc., lesson 6, page 87), sometimes using notation like “*ambu -n*”, “*kavi -m*”, “*tanu -f*” etc., (also on the same page), adjectives without using any notation like “*bahu*”, “*laghu*” and “*sādhu*” etc., (also on the same page). The author explains in the first lesson how to understand these words. However, the neuter *a*-stem nouns ending in *-m* have all been written as ending in an *anusvāra*. Normal *sandhi* would dictate that these should have been written with *-m*: see for example *kautūhalaṃ*, *dravyaṃ*, *bhojanaṃ* and *mukhaṃ* in lesson 5, page 77. Why the author has chosen not to follow *sandhi* in these words, I do not understand.

Another issue in these vocabulary lists is how roots with one or more prefixes are presented in the two scripts: While the author has clearly separated these prefixes from the root in Roman script with a root symbol and lack of sandhi (e. g., *pravnam*), he neither separates additional prefixes, as would have been better, with a hyphen and no sandhi, (e. g., better *sam-āvḥṛ-* and *vi-āvpad-* than *samāvḥṛ* and *vyāvpad*), nor does he show any separation whatsoever in Devanāgarī script, as would have been more clear for showing the structure (e. g., better प्र√नम्, सम्-आ√हृ, वि-आ√पद्, and अनु√स्था than प्रणम्, समाहृ, व्यापद्, and अनुष्ठ) (see pages 69, 130, 131, 201 and 223).

A noteworthy feature found at the end of many lessons (e. g., 1–3, 6–7, 9–11, 13–16 and 20) which I very much like are the diagrams or images with an accompanying sentence in Sanskrit, some of which are connected with the lesson's respective reading passage. Such visual elements bring novelty to the book and will likely enhance readers' attention by creating some fun. One only wishes that every lesson might have had this feature, if only as a matter of consistency.

Having so far dealt with general issues of structure and convention, in the rest of my review, I will offer observations and suggestions for each grammar

lesson and appendix in turn, followed at the end by some concluding observations and minor corrections.

Lesson 1 deals with the declension of *a-* and *ā-*stem nouns and adjectives and also the pronominal adjectives *tad* and *etad* — the latter only in the nominative case at this point, but for all three genders and all three numbers; the full declensions are given in table-form only from lesson 5 onwards. Introducing the use of adjectives in the very first lesson is noteworthy, but so is the fact that the author gives the feminine of the adjective *sundara* in a somewhat unusual way, as the *ā-*stem *sundarā* (see pages 38, 50, 64); he then corrects this in lesson 10 (page 155), giving the more common *ī-*stem, i. e. *sundarī*. Before this lesson, I find no instructions concerning the syntax of Sanskrit sentences, which I find regrettable.

It is indeed good to introduce roots and their conjugated verbal forms in the very beginning, since they are the basis of the Sanskrit language. In lesson 2, the author has given some brief information on the overall verbal system, already discussing vowel gradation, and mentioning the ten classes of roots, although he focuses then on the thematic ones. Among the latter, the author has here mentioned classes 1, 4 and 6; he omits class 10, which I see as a mistake. Also, in the further discussion of the thematic verbal forms later in the book, these roots should better also have been arranged according to their classes, rather than only here. The athematic verbal classes might also have better been mentioned here, which the author does not in order to avoid an excess of, as he puts it, “dry grammatical theory”. Similarly, the author touches here on the concepts of *parasmaipada* and *ātmanepada* without giving further explanation concerning their meaning and use, instead waiting until lesson 7 to do so. Even there, however, he has avoided mentioning the other term *ubhayapada* (used for roots having both *parasmaipada* and *ātmanepada* verbal forms, such as *vyaj-* and *vpac-*) which would have been appropriate. While discussing the fourth class of verbs, the author begins by speaking of the root *√dṛś-* but then goes on to designate it as a root *√paś-*. He mentions, rightly, that, traditionally, this root belongs to the first class according to traditional Sanskrit grammar, yet he uses it as an example of the fourth class. Any number of other roots belonging to this class might therefore have been better suited for this role than the root *√dṛś-*; for example, *√div-*, from which the fourth class traditionally takes its name, could have been used instead. In this lesson also an example conjugation from each class should have been given, rather than waiting, as the author does, until lesson 4 (page 70) with the conjugation of *√bhū-*.

After a brief presentation of roots and thematic verbal forms, the author discusses past passive participles (ppp) in lesson 3. These forms could have been

discussed step by step, illustrating individual elements of their formation and thereby producing a resulting spectrum of forms ranging from easy to difficult. Other ppp verbal forms ending in *-na* are discussed in lesson 8. Lesson 4 covers more pronouns, thematic verbal forms, basics of relative and indefinite pronouns and cardinal numbers.

Starting in lesson 5, the reader encounters full declensions tables for nouns and pronouns of various stems, as well as conjugation tables for *parasmaipada* and *ātmanepada* verbs, all using both Devanāgarī and Roman. The German translations given alongside the verb conjugations are appreciated. Similarly, one also finds such German glosses of nominal cases in several lessons. The author mentions “Präverben” under lesson 5 in the list of contents. However, he has forgotten to deal with the pre-verbs, prefixes, or prepositions (*upasargas*) in this lesson, which I find a serious omission.

In lesson 6, the author discusses in detail two of the four major types of compounds, namely, *karmadhāraya* and *tatpuruṣa* compounds. In lesson 7, he discusses the other two, *dvandva* and *bahuvrīhi* compounds, along with examples. Besides the given German names, the traditional terminology of *samāhāra-dvandva* and *itaretara-dvandva*, as found in some other books, would have supplied further clarity. Meanwhile, the author has explained what makes *bahuvrīhi* compounds different from *karmadhāraya* and *tatpuruṣa* compounds. He has also given examples of longer compounds with more members in them. The other major compound type, *avyayībhāva*, is explained in lesson 9, and the important *upapadatatpuruṣa* is discussed in lesson 11. In my view, it would have been more convenient to just treat all these types one after the other, in two or three continuous lessons.

After lesson 7, the author introduces a small section named “Exkurs: Zur Metrik”, on the basics of Sanskrit meters. In it, he discusses the simplest meter, the well-known *śloka* or *anuṣṭup/bh*, including its standard (*pathyā*) and variant forms (*vipulā*), the definitions of these and their technical aspects, all with example verses taken from Bhagavadgītā and *subhāṣitas*. I find this mini-lesson very important. Since more than half of Sanskrit literature is composed in the form of poetry, it is very necessary to have some knowledge and understanding of Sanskrit prosody.

In lesson 8 some consonant-stem declensions have been introduced. For the *s*-stem nouns and adjectives, the author has mentioned *sumanas* (f/m) and *apsaras* (f) and for these given only nominative singular forms. I feel the complete declensions would have provided more clarity, or, at the least, the nominative, accusative and vocative cases would have been helpful, for this would better illustrate how the masculine and feminine forms differ from those of the neuter. The gerund forms have been also discussed in this lesson. It is

good to see that the author has given a long list of roots with their present-tense 3rd person singular forms, ppp forms and gerund forms together in a table. Such tables and lists of verbal forms help the reader to understand the forms better. However, there are certain verbs having two forms such as *āgamyā* and *āgatya* from *√gam-*, *vardhitvā* and *√ddhvā* from *√vṛdh-* or *likhitvā* and *lekhitvā* from *√likh-*. In such cases, it is generally better to give both forms or the most commonly used form.

Lesson 9 discusses future-tense verbs and noun formation with the *-ana* suffix. The author gives a list of future tense verbs, which is good practice, but the table has not been systematically arranged, nor is it clear on what basis the roots in this list were selected. Some forms, too, may be grammatically correct but are not in common or frequent use. Similarly, *√bhakṣ-* is given as a class-1 root with its present- and future-tense forms *bhakṣati* and *bhakṣyati*; it is instead usually found as a class-10 root with present *bhakṣayati* and future *bhakṣayiṣyati*, which the author has also included in the list. Also, future forms such as *tyajiṣyati* from *√tyaj-*, *vartsyati* from *√vṛdh-*, *sakṣati/sahiṣyati* from *√sah-* and *likhiṣyati* from *√likh-* are not so common in use compared to *tyakṣati*, *vardhiṣyate*, *sahiṣyate* and *lekhīṣyati*. In such situations, it is perhaps best to give all possible forms, so as to avoid ambiguity. Besides this, it would have been preferable to discuss the future passive forms here as well.

Lesson 10 discusses the use of adjectives as nouns, formation of present passive verbs and their use, imperative verbal forms in the 2nd-person singular *parasmaipada* (only), more relative clauses, additional syntactic constructions with the ablative case and compounds in *-artham*, *-gata*, *-madhye*, *-samīpam*, *-samīpe*, etc. The discussion of these grammar points looks good. However, a list of roots with their present passive forms is missing here.

Lesson 11 discusses past active participles (pap), 10th-class verbs, causative forms of verbs, their gerund forms, their use in sentences, and conditional sentences with the use of *yadi*, *ced* and *tarhi*. It seems that the pap topic could have been covered more effectively with more examples of feminine and neuter forms. Again, a list of roots with present and ppp verbal forms together with causative verbs is provided here. Besides this, ordinal numbers have been dealt with very briefly in this lesson.

Lesson 12 deals with the topics of gerundives, present active participles, further discussion of the use of the locative case, including the locative absolute, and the use of *bhavant* as an honorific term. Here also the author gives a list of gerundive forms with their roots, which is appreciated.

Lesson 13 discusses verbs in past imperfect, infinitive and denominative forms. The infinitive forms are very easy in comparison with other verbal

forms. The formation of infinitives could have been dealt with step by step in a proper manner according to the roots, and a list of roots with infinitive forms would have been very useful here for the readers. As mentioned earlier, here again one notices the example of *√likh-* whose infinitive form with its *guṇa* grade *lekhitum* is more common than *likhitum*. Meanwhile, there appears the *parasmaipada* participial form *vartataḥ* from *√vṛt-* (page 198), in the sentence “*tasya dvau putrau vartataḥ*”, although the root generally takes *ātmanepada* forms. At the same time, the author has also given the *ātmanepada* form of this root on page 191. This will simply be confusing for readers. As far as I understand, *√vṛt-* takes *parasmaipada* forms also in the aorist, second future, desiderative and conditional forms (See Apte Sanskrit-English Dictionary, under *vṛt*, page 1489).

The next point in this same lesson is denominatives. It is an important part of Sanskrit grammar and one full lesson can be easily devoted to it. However, the author has discussed the topic very briefly here, without proper treatment of formation, uses or examples. Furthermore, this lesson contains two readings at the end of the lesson whereas in all other lessons only one reading is given.

Lesson 14 discusses some more pronominal declensions such as *idam* and *adas*, in all three genders, but their stems are instead named as *ayam* and *asau*.

In lesson 15 are discussed *in-* and *vin-*stem nouns, along with their derivation from other nouns, for example, *mantrin* from *mantraḥ* and *pakṣin* from *pakṣaḥ*. However, the author also states that *svāmin* derives from *sva*, without explaining where, if this is true, the additional *-ma-* comes from, nor how the root is lengthened to *svā*. This is unnecessarily confusing.

Also in this lesson, having previously discussed imperative 2. Sg. P. forms in lesson 10, the author comes back to this topic again and gives complete conjugations of *√bhū-* (P) and *√labh-* (Ā). However, example sentences are missing here. Further, the author goes on to discuss imperative passive, also only briefly.

In lessons 16 to 19 are discussed the athematic conjugations, i. e. verb classes 2, 3, 5, 7, 8 and 9, as well as aorists and perfects, the conditional, and future participles. Lesson 20, the final lesson, deals with desiderative forms, the benedictive mood, injunctives, intensives and periphrastic future forms, but in very brief manner, without examples, as if in a hurry. There is not even any mention of desiderative nouns.

At the end of the book the author has provided several appendixes. In the first one, he has given a list of 131 roots and their various verbal forms, which is good for the students. In the second appendix, he has listed 16 prefixes (*upa-* *sargas*) and their meanings, despite the traditional enumeration of 20 (or 22); no explanation is given for omitting the rest (*parā*, *dus/dur*, *api* and *su*). The third

appendix suggests some supplementary literature on Sanskrit language and grammar, including dictionaries, followed by a bibliography. From the bibliography, it looks as though the author has not consulted any traditional accounts of Sanskrit grammar, but rather only modern secondary literature. A glossary of Sanskrit roots and words, arranged in alphabetical order, is also given, followed by a grammatical index. Finally, the author provides several tables: of ligatures, of ordinal and cardinal numbers and of *sandhi* rules at-a-glance.

In my view, the author has covered almost all aspects of Sanskrit grammar in this book. Some are explained well, some briefly and others very briefly. A few points are left aside: gerunds in –am, ditransitive verbs, prefixes (*upasargas*) and a few irregular declensions of nouns. Having made it through this book, the reader will have an overall knowledge of Sanskrit grammar. Given the many brief explanations, it seems that the book merits its name “Grundkurs Sanskrit”, or Basic course in Sanskrit. Irrespective of its shortcomings, however, I appreciate the efforts of the author to compose such a book for learners of Sanskrit, and I congratulate him for it. I wish that the book attracts the attention of potential students of Sanskrit and helps them in their endeavor.